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CHRIS KERN

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ELECTION '76: FIVE JOURNALISTS LOOK BACK

ANNCR:

SOME OF THE MOST PROMINENT JOURNALISTS WHO COVERED THE AMERICAN ELECTION CAMPAIGN TRADED OBSERVATIONS LAST WEEK IN WASHINGTON, AND CHRIS KERN HAS SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT WHAT THEY SAID.

VOICE:

THIS HAS BEEN THE MOST INTENSELY REPORTED AMERICAN POLITICAL CAMPAIGN EVER. PORTABLE TELEVISION EQUIPMENT AND ELECTRONIC EDITING BROUGHT IT RIGHT INTO EVERYBODY'S LIVING ROOM. BUT THE MOST THOUGHTFUL COVERAGE STILL COMES FROM THE PENCIL AND PAPER REPORTER WITH A GOOD EYE FOR DETAIL, AND FIVE OF THE BEST OF THEM GOT TOGETHER AT THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB THE OTHER DAY TO DISCUSS A FEW OF THE DETAILS THEY OBSERVED IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS.

(OPT) THE FIVE WERE R.W. APPLE OF THE NEW YORK TIMES, DAVID BRODER OF THE WASHINGTON POST, HIGH SIDNEY OF TIME MAGAZINE, AND SYNDICATED COLUMNISTS MARY MCGRORY AND GEORGE WILL. (END OPT)

PROBABLY THE MOST STRIKING POINT THEY MADE WAS THAT WHAT HAPPENED ON NOVEMBER SECOND CAN BE ANALYZED IN TERMS OF THE ACTIONS -- OR INACTION -- OF MANY DIFFERENT VOTER GROUPS. OR AS R.W. APPLE OF THE NEW YORK TIMES PUT IT, "THERE WERE SEVEN HUNDRED THOUSAND KINDS OF CRUCIAL VOTES IN THIS ELECTION -- IT WAS THAT CLOSE."

PROBABLY THE SECOND MOST STRIKING POINT THE REPORTERS MADE WAS HOW MUCH THEY AGREE ON WHAT GAVE JIMMY CARTER HIS NARROW MARGIN. THE BLACK VOTE WAS A FACTOR. ALMOST ALL OF IT -- SOMETHING ON THE ORDER OF NINETY-FIVE PERCENT, ACCORDING TO

THE EARLY SURVEYS -- WENT TO MR. CARTER. THE VICE-PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES WERE A FACTOR. WALTER MONDALE SEEMED TO WIN SUPPORT FOR MR. CARTER. BOB DOLE APPEARED TO HURT PRESIDENT FORD.

THE REPORTERS ALSO AGREED ON SOME OF THE FACTORS THAT WORKED IN MR. FORD'S FAVOR. TRUST WAS A FORD ISSUE. THE VOTERS FELT THAT MR. FORD HAD RESTORED THE TRUST IN GOVERNMENT THAT WAS MISSING AS A RESULT OF THE WAR IN VIETNAM AND WATERGATE. AND MANY VOTERS SIMPLY DIDN'T TRUST MR. CARTER. THEY DIDN'T TRUST HIS RECORD AS GOVERNOR AS GEORGIA AND THEY DIDN'T TRUST HIS CAMPAIGN STATEMENTS, WHICH SOMETIMES SEEMED TO WANDER OFF IN DIFFERENT AND CONFLICTING DIRECTIONS.

THE REPORTERS NOTED THAT BOTH CANDIDATES HAD SOME INHERENT ADVANTAGES. MR. FORD WAS AN INCUMBENT, AND INCUMBENT PRESIDENTS HAVE BEEN DEFEATED ONLY SIX TIMES BEFORE. MR. CARTER WAS A DEMOCRAT, AND OF THOSE VOTERS WHO IDENTIFY AT ALL WITH ANY PARTY, TWICE AS MANY IDENTIFY WITH THE DEMOCRATS AS WITH THE REPUBLICANS

IT IS POSSIBLE TO CONCLUDE FROM THE REPORTERS' DISCUSSION THAT IT WAS HOW EACH CANDIDATE BALANCED HIS ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES THAT DECIDED THE ELECTION. BOTH MEN HELD ON TO MOST OF THEIR INITIAL SUPPORT, BUT BOTH MEN DROVE SOME VOTES AWAY. MR. CARTER'S INITIAL SUPPORT WAS GREATER -- ABOUT THIRTY PERCENTAGE POINTS GREATER, ACCORDING TO THE PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS -- AND HE KEPT JUST ENOUGH OF IT TO WIN. IN THE WORDS OF SYNDICATED COLUMNIST MARY MCGRORY: "JIMMY CARTER MADE IT VERY DIFFICULT FOR DEMOCRATS TO VOTE FOR HIM. BUT, IN THE END, GERALD FORD MADE IT POSSIBLE."